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Letter from XANANA GUSMAO to a priest in East Timor

Reverend Father,

It is with great pleasure that I send warmest revolutionary greetings to you and all who identify themselves as real sons of our people and who share the same preoccupations, anxiety and above all the same determination to defend the right of our people in the belief that our dearest people will defeat the aggressor of our motherland.

The opportunities given us during the favourable period of Portuguese colonisation have equipped us to lead our martyred Maubere people and therefore,without the slightest hesitation, we must take the initiative convinced that we are fulfilling the historical obligations arising from the socio-political situation of our country and that alongside our people we must with determination work to achieve their fundamental liberation.

Unfortunately, many who are in a position to lead our people or at least be alongside them to guide and encourage think that our people do not have any right to claim freedom and are predestined to live as slaves.

However even if there are traitors who have too easily come to venerate new masters, once the escudo now the rupiah, and who discourage our people's will to be free out of self-interest, our people know that there are real sons who, although few, are determined to join them in the hard struggle, real sons who know what they feel, know what they want and what they are searching for and who have demonstrated that whatever obstacles they face and whatever sacrifices are needed, they will stand firm next to them, the heroic Maubere people!

Reverend Father, companion in struggle and brother of the Maubere people. The position you and other Timorese priests have taken is both a great consolation and a moral and political inspiration to us,whereas those who were born here but do not recognise the rights of our people only deserve our disdain!

It is true that the Church is not involved in politics in the narrow sense of the word. But, on the other hand, it cannot remove itself from the milieu in which it is integrated because those who make it up, laity and clergy, are living members of the society in which the Church is inserted.

Fretilin does not regard the Church as an abstract entity, and even less as unreal or fictitious, because its prophetic mission (I would say it mission of liberation) is in practice to support the people in their struggle for liberation. If the Church's concept of liberation does not lead to integral and direct involvement how do you explain the position taken by Cardinal Sin of the Philippines, Bishop Tutu, or by Churches all over the world in defence of solutions based on the rights of people? Direct involvement means that the Church must affirm the fundamental rights and freedom of society. We think that if the Church stays out of politics it only places itself over society and becomes a dead structure, a structure without a mission in society, a situation which will only debase the Church and isolate it from the people's rights and freedom.

Reverend Father, aren't we in danger of being deluded by the 'fantastic conversions' which have occurred. Whereas if we are objective and keep our feet firmly planted on Timorese soil, we have to admit that the reason for these miraculous conversions is really the people's search for protection allied to their rejection of the occupier.

It is not our intention to offend the Church by saying these things (which are readily apparent to anyone with good sense) but simply to affirm that our people want to maintain their hope and belief that the Church of East Timor will continue to interpret faithfully their aspirations, anxieties, wishes and struggle. If not, the Maubere people may come to lose the confidence they have placed in the Church if they come to think that the Church opposes what they have sacrificed their lives for. It would be the Church's own fault if these quick conversions were to turn around.

Dear Father, I once belonged to a worthless bracket in Timorese society which, despite having the baptismal certificate as an identity card, indulged in the beach and bad habits, and for which money and corruption had taken God's place. Statistically there were a reasonable number of Catholics but on the level of real faith, real Catholics were reduced to those who observed their Sunday obligations. The Church cannot be satisfied with numbers which are illusory if not accompanied by real practice of faith.

We know and we lament the 'holy war' the enemy is waging in the controlled areas, leading to 'ad hoc' conversions followed by acceptance of doctrine. Nothing is more prejudicial to the Church we respect. We know the difficulties, the good intentions and efforts being made, but we think that unless the Church avoids self-satisfaction the essentials of conversion will be reduced to simple statistics.

We believe that the circumstances of war generated the massive conversions and that this demonstrates the trust of our people in their Church. This trust will be compromised if the Church does not place itself alongside our people. Frustration will follow and faith will be dissolved in 'luliks' as the real bearers of the people's aspirations. I am not a priest or a catechist but I know several occasions when people have turned to the Church at a time of problems, sickness or affliction but, right after, have returned to their practice of 'hamulak'.

Reverend Father, we do not deny or forget the firm and brave attitudes taken by the Timorese Church and we know that our struggle would be much more difficult but for the indispensable support the East Timorese Church has been giving the resistance! However I know that there are some Goanese priests in Timor who are 'seratus persen' (one hundred percent) Indonesian and that Mgr Belo himself (although he does not deny the rights of the East Timorese people) defends integration under the facade of 'autonomy'. These political differences within the Church will reduce the capacity of the Church to represent, as it has in the past, with authority and a clear voice ... which must be heard!

The blind theory defended by the 'one hundred percenters' is a vile treason to our people. By it some members of the Church legitimise crime and injustice thereby making impossible real peace in the homeland of the Maubere people.

Peace is only possible in East Timor with the consent of Fretilin. Any effort to impose peace by surrendering (promoted by the puppet governor to induce guerillas to return to their villages for reintegration in society) will lead to the continuing of the war. We are capable of attacking and destroying villages and camps and controlling movement in most parts of the country, but we do not do it to save the people further suffering. As a liberation movement we have the sacred duty to continue to affirm to our one thousand times heroic people that we will continue fighting, whatever the price, until we are victorious or exterminated.

The trust and respect we have for the Timorese Church will give way to deep frustration if the Church turns away from our people. Reverend Father, that is not a threat (for God's sake) but I must confess that the disillusionment would be too upsetting for us to easily forget it! I refer to the Church as a whole, for all of us in the bush recognise profoundly that many priests have suffered together with our people not by sensational words but by their firm and continued actions and tough and persistent efforts beside our people with Mgr Martinho Lopes at their head and sons like Fr Francisco Fernandes.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II, in an address to catechists, stressed the most important mission carried out by them declaring that the Church will always need them. We have the same opinion of the Timorese priests, the true sons of East Timor and those foreign priests who have given themselves to the cause of our people and a small number of well-formed catechists. However we can completely do without the 'one hundred percenters'; these second class Indonesian citizens can work for the Republic of Indonesia to convert the large number of Moslems in their country. But they will not leave by themselves because they are protected by a rich governor who supports their plan for autonomy, but as part of greater Indonesia! There they can claim their right to speak Portuguese freely and talk in Tetum about the rupiahs they have been able to make.

Reverend Father, forgive our language and uncontrolled state of soul: but it is difficult for us to tolerate certain individuals who ignore the disgrace, destruction and death of our people which is no different to any other people in the world. In the South Pacific a small number of islands with a few hundred thousand people have been able to form states. Maldives, Seychelles are the smallest points on the map but are independent countries. The Timorese people with their natural resources which will guarantee development cannot be independent just because Indonesia does not want it. The message sent to the students in Indonesia (I presume your Reverence knows of this) was to answer the vacillating position taken by Mgr Belo and the 'one hundred percenters'.

Scrawling under pressure of anger because some renegade sons of our people want to deny the rights of our people, I request you Reverend Father to pass on our message to the other priests and the appeal of the leaders of the struggle to settle the political differences in the Church and reunite them as <u>one authoritative voice</u>.

Finally I apologise for the character of this message but I think these are crucial problems being debated by our people at a time when an inadequate position taken by the Church will only result in suffering and continuation of war allowing the enemy to exterminate our people.

With great esteem,

<u>Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao</u>
Commander in Chief, Falintil

East Timor, 27 June 1986